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Shortfall might delay widening of U.S. 93

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KINGMAN, Ariz. -- A federal funding crunch might crimp a link in a chain of transportation improvements aimed at speeding travel between Southern Nevada and northwest Arizona.

The shortfall of the federal highway trust fund as the federal fiscal year nears its close at the end of September jeopardizes the effort to expand to four lanes the 15-mile stretch of U.S. Highway 93 that will connect with the Arizona approach to the bypass bridge over the Colorado River, just south of Hoover Dam.

Ninety-five percent of the project's estimated \$107 million price tag will be federally funded, said Michele Beggs, a spokeswoman for the Arizona Department of Transportation district based in Kingman.

She said the U.S. 93 upgrade and five other major transportation projects in Arizona have been placed on hold while state officials hope for favorable congressional action on the proposed transfer of \$8 billion to the highway trust fund from the general fund.

"This has been a crisis in the making for more than a year, and the federal government has refused to act," Arizona's governor, Janet Napolitano, said. "As a result of federal mismanagement and funding loss, Arizona will be forced to delay vital highway projects at a time when we are facing crippling congestion and a need for economic stimulation."

Beggs said Arizona transportation officials will proceed with plans to open bids for the U.S. 93 project on Sept. 26. But she said the state will not be able to award a bid if the highway trust fund is not replenished.

Any delay of the U.S. 93 project probably would disrupt the effort to have the widening work be completed about the same time the new bypass bridge is ready to carry traffic between Nevada and Arizona in late 2010.

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